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LIBYA THREATENED WITH DISINTEGRATION

Egypt is currently meddling in the internal and international affairs of its next-door neighbor, Libya, in such a way that it jeopardizes the very existence of the two-year old kingdom, thereby threatening American and Western military and political interests in its existence and stability.

Libya is a federated state composed of three provinces -- Tripolitania, Cyrenaica and the Fezzan. They have little natural unity, but were consolidated by the United Nations in December 1951 under a constitutional monarch, King Idriss, who is also the religious head of Cyrenaica. The king offers Libya no inspiring leadership; in fact, he seems more interested in retiring to his ancestral hills and allowing the infant state to disintegrate. His people are economically poor and largely illiterate, without political consciousness, and the government depends on British financial assistance. There are politicians and cliques but no real administrative talent. There is, however, an able, pro-Western prime minister, Mahmoud Muntasser, presently in conflict

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with the king.

The situation generates serious political, economic and administrative problems, and this weak state, with poor all-around leadership, is confronted with pressing problems in foreign affairs. Egypt is trying to draw Libya firmly into the Arab camp; Italy, which took Libya away from the Turks in 1911, is trying to promote a treaty providing it with a favorable settlement of its property claims; and both France and Britain want military base agreements.

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The United States has a large and important airbase at

Wheeler Field 16 miles east of Tripoli. The base was acquired during the war but we have been unable to get a formal agreement to use it. Lacking this agreement, we have not paid a rental fee for its use. The Libyans have proved difficult on this subject by continually raising the proposed annual fee and talking about

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American infringement of their sovereignty.

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We are following this course because we want Libya to continue. The king has no male heir, has no national leadership, and is surrounded by poor advisers. He has interfered so much recently with the normal administration of the country - last week he summarily removed three top administrators - that Prime Minister Muntasser is on the verge of resignation. Should this occur, the dissolution of the kingdom becomes a real possibility since there is no one interested in Libyan unity capable of replacing him.

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Egyptian activity in Libya is not helping the situation
either. Egypt appears to be interested in achieving a preeminent
position of influence in Libya. To that end, Cairo is influencing
the king and his advisers. It is sending teachers for the local
schools and giving financial advice.

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Libya's Arab and Moslem character naturally incline it toward
the Arab states. Its admission to the Arab League on 28 March was
accordingly a logical development which draws Libya away from the

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West. This adds to the disintegrating tendencies already at work, subverting Libyan unity and integrity and presenting the West with another Arab-Western problem. Should Cairo under the inspiration of its ambitious Vice Premier Colonel Nasr adopt a tougher line toward the West, it would probably reflect itself in Egyptian activity in Libya.

These developments do not serve American military or political interests in Libya, nor do they advance the moral and political interest that the United Nations has in the continued existence of Libya. The situation accordingly is such that Libya could break apart.

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